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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/19/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNSC](#) [AG](#) [WI](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: ALGERIAN PERMREP CONFIRMS POLISARIO ACCEPTANCE OF DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS

REF: ALGIERS 543

Classified By: Amb. Jackie W. Sanders. E.O 12958. Reasons  
1.4 (B&D)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an April 19 meeting with Ambassador Sanders, Algerian PermRep Yousfi confirmed that the Polisario has agreed to enter into direct negotiations with Morocco provided the invitation to negotiations is couched in the language of paragraph 47 of the Secretary-General's April 13 Report on the situation concerning Western Sahara: that the Security Council should "call on the parties, Morocco and the Polisario Front, to enter into negotiations without preconditions, with a view to achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The neighboring countries, Algeria and Mauritania, should also be invited to these negotiations and be consulted separately on issues directly affecting them, in accordance with the format that was observed during the tenure of (the SYG's) previous Personal Envoy, Mr. James A. Baker, III." Yousfi said that Algeria understands Morocco to have accepted the Secretary-General's report, including its formula for

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starting negotiations. The key, he stressed, is that "self-determination" should be mentioned in the invitation; absent such a mention, the Polisario would not agree to negotiate. Also, to ensure the opportunity is not lost, Yousfi said, careful attention needed to be given to the upcoming MINURSO resolution's characterization of the proposals presented by the Polisario and Morocco. The Polisario would interpret praise for the Moroccan plan without appreciation for the Polisario plan as a Security Council precondition meant to ensure that the negotiations discuss only of the Moroccan plan. Assuming appropriate language, Yousfi said, the Polisario would be ready to negotiate almost immediately. End Summary.

¶1. (C) Algerian PermRep Youssef Yousfi, accompanied by his DCM and a poloff, met at his request with Ambassador Sanders, accompanied by Ambassador Ross and Poloff, April 19 to preview impending Security Council consideration of the MINURSO renewal and efforts to promote a settlement of the Western Sahara conflict.

Algeria/Polisario Are For Negotiations; Para 47

¶2. (C) Yousfi opened by expressing Algeria's satisfaction

with the SYG's latest report, which both Algeria and the Polisario find to be balanced, and which Morocco accepts as well. Algeria agrees with both the content and recommendations of the report, but is now concerned about the text of the draft resolution on MINURSO renewal. For the first time, negotiations seem possible. Both Polisario and Algeria agree that negotiations should be held. To ensure that this opportunity is not lost, two important issues need careful attention, the wording of the invitation and the resolution's characterization of the proposals presented by the Polisario and Morocco.

¶3. (C) Yousfi stressed that the invitation to negotiations should be couched in the language of paragraph 47 of the SYG's report: The Security Council should "call on the parties, Morocco and the Polisario Front, to enter into negotiations without preconditions, with a view to achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The neighboring countries, Algeria and Mauritania, should also be invited to these negotiations and be consulted separately on issues directly affecting them, in accordance with the format that was observed during the tenure of (the SYG's) previous Personal Envoy, Mr. James A. Baker, III." It is Algeria's understanding, he said, that Morocco accepts this formula. Algeria for its part has convinced the Polisario to enter into direct negotiations, but the letter of invitation must state that their purpose is to reach a solution that will provide for self-determination. Without mention of self-determination as put forth in paragraph 47, the Polisario will not agree to negotiate.

¶4. (C) Turning to how the proposals put forth by the Polisario and Morocco will be characterized in the MINURSO resolution, Yousfi emphasized that, to give the new opportunity a chance, the resolution must give the two proposals equal treatment. If it does not, the Polisario will refuse to enter negotiations. On the issue of MINURSO's extension, he stated that Algeria has no problem with the SYG's recommendation of a six-month extension. Noting that the U.S. has a large role in drafting the MINURSO resolution, he asked for our views on what might be expected on the various issues he raised.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Sanders noted that our Embassy in Algiers recently communicated our position to the Algerian Government, so it should come as no surprise. The draft resolution is still under consideration within the USG, so it is not yet available more widely. However, we will propose a two-month extension of MINURSO because this shorter extension will help to maintain the momentum for a settlement. MINURSO has been in existence since 1991 and, unfortunately, has not been able to achieve its purpose. The U.S. position remains that it would be happy to host negotiations without preconditions, and the issue of an invitation will be carefully addressed in the resolution. As for the two proposals that have recently been put forward, we view Morocco's proposal as serious and credible and as something new, while we read the Polisario's proposal as essentially a repackaging of the Baker plan. Regrettably, as Ambassador Sanders had told Foreign Minister Bejdaoui, even with the best of intentions, the approaches of the past have gotten us nowhere. Given the existence of differing views on the merits of the two plans, the U.S. believes that proceeding to negotiations without preconditions rooted in either plan is important.

¶6. (C) Yousfi insisted that the resolution must provide for an invitation that makes reference to self-determination in the same way as para 47 of the SYG's report. Without such a reference, and with praise for the Moroccan proposal without an appreciation of the Polisario's proposal, it will be extremely difficult to get the Polisario to go to negotiations. If the Security Council welcomes one plan, but not the other, the Polisario will have the feeling that the Council has created a precondition and that the negotiations are meant to discuss only the Moroccan plan.

¶ 7. (C) Ambassador Ross urged the Algerian government to focus on the framework of negotiations established by the letter of invitation, which we expect will call for negotiations without preconditions to seek a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict. Algeria should not get caught up in the wording of the MINURSO resolution on the two plans and should ensure that the Polisario does not do so, since it will be the letter of invitation, and not so much the resolution, that frames the basis and purpose of negotiations. Yousfi took the point, but went on to say that the wording of the resolution is important as well. On the two proposals and on the invitation to negotiations, it should stick closely to the language of the SYG's report, which everyone has accepted.

¶ 8. (C) Ambassador Ross asked Yousfi to confirm our understanding that the Polisario's position on negotiations has evolved. Whereas in previous contacts, Polisario spokesmen have asserted that the Polisario will not go to negotiations unless they are based on the Baker approach, it now appears that it accepts negotiations without preconditions. Yousfi agreed that indeed there has been an evolution and that the Polisario is now willing to proceed to direct negotiations as long as the letter of invitation tracks the language of para 47 of the SYG's report and no distinction is made in the resolution's treatment of the two proposals now before the Council. Ross repeated that the Polisario and Algeria should focus on the letter of invitation and not so much what is in the resolution.

#### Algerians: No or Equal Mention of Proposals

¶ 9. (C) Yousfi's DCM affirmed that the best situation would be no mention of either plan; next best would be equal treatment of both; worst would be praise for the Moroccan proposal alone, because this would be viewed as partisan. Ambassador Sanders repeated that we view the Moroccan proposal as serious and credible and as a new element, while we see the Polisario's proposal as a rehash of old history. While our tactics may have changed, our strategic objective remains the same: a mutually accepted political settlement through direct negotiations. Ambassador Ross added that previous plans to

reach a settlement had failed and the Moroccan plan at least offers a fresh approach, while, as far as we can see, there is nothing new in the Polisario's plan. Yousfi countered that, clearly, the U.S. and Algeria have different evaluations of the two plans. To bless the Moroccan plan is to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara, something that no country has done to date. In any event, the Moroccan plan is simply a reformulation of a proposal put forward in 2001 that Algeria rejected. The Polisario, for its part, is now proposing implementation of the Baker plan through a referendum whose results, whatever they may be, it will respect, as well as through enumeration of the guarantees and privileges that a Sahrawi state will accord Morocco and Moroccans in the Western Sahara in the event independence is the outcome.

¶ 10. (C) Ambassador Ross urged Yousfi to look beyond the content of the two plans and the MINURSO resolution and focus on what is really important: the opening of direct negotiations without preconditions. Yousfi insisted on coming back to the resolution and asked what the U.S. objective is in calling the Moroccan plan "serious and credible." Is it just to please the Moroccans? Whatever the case is, saying this will not serve the objective of getting to negotiations. Treating the two plans differently will jeopardize this objective, one shared by Algeria and the U.S., and it is not worth the risk. Yousfi asserted that the Algerian government is already very nervous about the resolution and is torn whether to continue supporting negotiations.

¶ 11. (C) Ambassador Sanders asked in closing how soon after issuance of a letter of invitation the Polisario would be

ready to begin negotiations. Yousfi replied that ten days would be ample time. He in turn asked how long we think that negotiations should last. Do we expect them to be completed in the two-month period we are suggesting for MINURSO extension? Ambassador Sanders replied that, no, we want them at least to start during that period.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: Hours later, the Polisario came in with essentially the same message. Coordination is alive and well. End Comment.

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